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AUTHOR Gregory, Leonard L.; Freeman, Lucille M.
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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the "old paradigm" in education is a collection of assumptions, beliefs, and values that underlie the workings of present-day schools. The old paradigm is based on the notion of education as a meritocratic enterprise, institutional rationality, the positivist approach to truth, commitment to efficiency, and schooling for the status quo. School restructuring has not occurred, because the dominant "business-as-usual" paradigm around which the school is organized is so strong any new program model eventually adopts the characteristic of the school organization that is in place. The bureaucratic ways in which schools are managed and organized constrain restructuring and serve a sorting function. The middle school concept and authentic assessment are examples of innovative models that disappeared from the school system because they were incorporated by the old paradigm. (LMI)

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The "Old Paradigm" is a collection of assumptions, beliefs and values that underlie the workings of present-day schools. This paradigm functions to defuse efforts at systemic change. Before any meaningful change can be made in the schooling process, the old paradigm itself must be changed. Modification of the old paradigm is the overlooked, or forgotten, prerequisite for change.

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Presenters: Leonard L. Gregory, EdD
Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Lucille M. Freeman, PhD
Professional Teacher Education
College of Education
University of Nebraska at Kearney

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Paradigm Shift: The Forgotten Prerequisite for Change

The "Old Paradigm" is a collection of assumptions, beliefs and values that underlie the workings of present-day schools. This paradigm functions to defuse efforts at systemic change. Before any meaningful change can be made in the schooling process, the old paradigm itself must be changed. Modification of the old paradigm is the overlooked, or forgotten, prerequisite for change. What are the assumptions, beliefs and values that together make up the paradigm which supports present-day schooling processes? Where did they come from? How do they function to defuse efforts to preclude change?

Characteristics of the Old Paradigm

Several key ideas are incorporated in the old paradigm. While there are others which a thorough discussion would have to include, those included here are sufficiently representative for the purposes of this discussion.

An Educational Meritocracy. One pillar of the old paradigm is the conception of education as a meritocractic enterprise. Those students with the most ability will have the best chances to succeed. The system is unabashedly geared biased toward sorting, grouping, and tracking in order that the best students can be identified. Every student has an equal chance, in a sense. A various times in our history, teachers have been exhorted to accept the responsibility of sorting students and educating them for that life work which is appropriate for them. Comparative grading of student work, and standardized achievement tests all function to sort students. Grouping students by age and moving class groups through the same content at the same rate also functions to sort students. Those who can learn algebra in

180 days succeed. Those who could learn algebra but who might need more than 180 days to do so, do not succeed. Time itself functions as a sorting element.

The idea that all students can be successful learners is simply not compatible with old paradigm ideas of success. Can all students learn? The old paradigm has never included a commitment to the education of all students, except on the superficial level of the right of all students to attend a public school. The power of the belief that the purpose of schooling is to sort students is evident in the way in which failure of students is explained. The blame is placed on the individual student, rather than on the school. This is the second pillar of the old paradigm and it is called "institutional rationality".

Institutional Rationality. Schools themselves are considered rational in the manner in which they operate. When schooling does not result in success for the student, the problem is assumed to lie with the student, rather than with any school-related variable. That is why there is much concern and hand-wringing about "at risk students" and none about "at risk schools". The very phrase is incompatible with the old paradigm. When teachers are asked about possible factors which contributed to drop-outs in their schools, few have anything to say about the curriculum, the teachers, the methodology, the hidden curriculum, the activities programs or the school's administration. In fact, in 794 such interviews with teachers in the Chicago public schools, never once was any school-related variable mentioned by the teachers. Never once. There's the power of the old paradigm. Combine the power of institutional rationality with the absence of competition which public schools enjoy and the result is not likely to be a situation which motivates school personnel to risk real change.

The problems that arise when students are not successful lead to the testing of students to find out what is wrong with them. The result has been a myriad of problems, each carrying its own label and each requiring it's own teacher-specialist.

Positivist approach to truth. A third pillar of the old paradigm is a positivist approach to truth. Truth is considered to be out there somewhere and education looks to the soft sciences such as sociology and educational psychology for identification of truths to guide practice. The soft sciences use the methods of the hard sciences in this quest. The results are package approaches with training for teachers in the correct steps associated with discipline (assertive discipline), instruction (the so-called "Hunter Model"), and methodology (cooperative learning); teachers and school administrators who look to the experts for answers, who look to national research for solutions to local problems; and a singularly contextual, reductionist approach to schooling processes.

Commitment to efficiency. A fourth pillar of the old paradigm is a commitment to efficiency, a legacy from the early 1900s as labor struggled with management for control of the shop floor. Grouping students by age is efficient. Standardized tests are efficient. Interchangeable, certified teachers are efficient. Teacher centeredness is efficient. But most of all, large size is efficient. By 1985, 65% of high school graduates attended schools with 5000 or more students (Karp, Walter, "Why Johnny Can't Read." Harper's Magazine. 1985).

Schooling for the *status quo.* A final pillar of the old paradigm answers that question which must be answered by schools in every society. What will be the relationship of schools to the political economy of this society? It has not been our tradition to educate students to become political activists. Our tradition is one in which the schools function to

support societal structures and institutions as they exist, including the agenda of business and industrial interests. A concerted campaign on the part of business and industrial leaders after the depression succeeded in convincing the public that free enterprise is the American way of life and that what is good for business is good for America (Walker, S.H. and Paul Sklar, "Business finds its voice." Harper's Magazine, January 1938, pp. 113-124.) Initial aggressive monitoring of history and government curricula by business leaders engendered controversy and after the second world war business employed a more beneficent approach, in which business leaders provided much financial assistance to the public school. It seemed a time in which what was good for business was good for America and as the government enacted protective tariffs and deeded land to the railroad, the schools did their part by educating students to be the workers business needed: punctual, respectful of authority, willing to follow rules, and possessing cooperative attitudes. Today, however, it is not so evident that what is good for business is good for America. Business are transnational rather than national in nature and the labor force is global rather than national. But the belief that what is good for business is still good for America persists, as a part of the old paradigm, which functions to prohibit the very kinds of change that business, among other entities, now demands: individuals who can work in teams, who can critically analyze and synthesize information, who are flexible and creative, and who have highly developed skill with applications of knowledge. The need for change within the structure and processes of education to produce such individuals comes from all quarters and with increasing stridency.

A great deal has been written about the calls for efforts restructuring education: the National Goals 200 initiative; authentic assessment; cooperative learning; critical thinking,

multiage grouping, and so on. Nevertheless, the status quo of schooling processes remains systemically unchanged.

The premise here is that restructuring has not occurred, even though the term has been used freely and indiscriminately. There have been attempts at remodeling or reprogramming through the introduction of new programs or models, but because the business as usual (functionalist) paradigm around which the school is organized is so strong any new program or model eventually adopts the characteristic of the school organization that is in place or the characteristics of the paradigm. Therefore, what is the basic premise of the business as usual or functionalist paradigm? Feinberg and Soltis (School and Society. Teachers College, Columbia University, 1985, p. 16)) described it as, ". . .functionalists argue that all societies require that their members perform different tasks. Selection, socialization, and training processes are needed to assure that jobs, even unpleasant are demanding ones get done." Schools then are organized to be sorting machines. Schools must be standardized and rational to sort the students.

There are several characteristics in the school to show why restructuring doesn't take place. This paper describes two and gives some examples. The two most obvious are the way schools are managed and the way schools are organized.

Schools are organized around two bureaucracies, the machine bureaucracy and the professional bureaucracy. Irregardless of the many volumes of literature that expound the concept of "effective schools", schools are still organized into two bureaucracies. First, the management of the schools is a machine bureaucracy. The machine bureaucracy is based on Frederick W. Taylors scientific management theory. Basically, there are four principles: job analysis, selection of personnel, management cooperation and functional supervision. The functional aspect is explained by Sktric, ". . .work can be coordinated by standardizing the work processes, which is accomplished through formalization detailed specifications, precise instructions and rules. Because machine bureaucracies coordinate their work by rationalizing and formalizing it so that each worker does his part of the total job. . . .Schools are forced by

managers and by institutionalized environment to adopt all the trappings of the machine bureaucracy (rationalization of work, standardization of work processes, formalization of work behavior) even though they are ill suited to the technical demands of doing complex work." (Thomas Skrtic, Behind Special Education: A Critical Analysis of Professional Culture and School Organization. Denver: Love Publishing Co., 1991, p. 162.) There have been attempts at modifying the original principles to make each more humane or trying to develop more cooperation and positive relationships among the actors in the educational community; however, the basic principles still remain in tact, i.e., there is still the superordinant/subordinant relationship. The second bureaucracy is the professional bureaucracy. The work in the classroom by teachers very complex work and coordinated by standardization of the skills of the workers which is accomplished through professionalization. Skrtic observed,". . .the logic of formalization rests on minimizing discretion and separating theory from practice, professionalization, in principle is premised on increasing discretion and uniting theory and practice, which is necessary because complex work requires the adaptation of general theories or principles to variable cases or clients.. . . .The workers in a professional bureaucracy, however are loosely coupled because standardization of skills creates a form of interdependency in which professionals share common facilities and resources but do the entire job alone with an assigned." (Thomas Skrtic, Behind Special Education: A Critical Analysis of Professional Culture and School Organization, Denver: Love Publishing Co., 1991, p. 162) In the professional bureaucracy the coordination among teachers is loose at best. Each teacher is a professional and only know what each other is doing by way of their common professionalism. Teachers view themselves as the center most focal point of schooling , the people who know schooling better than anyone else. The teachers become isolated in their own worlds as professionals and are affected by little that transpires in the outside world.

In summary schools have two levels of bureaucracy, the machine bureaucracy, management, that is very tightly coupled tied together by job descriptions that make workers highly dependent on each other "because they each do one part of the larger activity." (Thomas

Skrtic, Behind Special Education: A Critical Analysis of Professional Culture and School Organization, Denver: Love Publishing Co., 1991, p. 163). In the professional bureaucracy, teachers do their jobs almost independently of each other. Any new model or new program implemented by the school district will in practice have very little impact on the classroom teacher. For example, when computer technology was first introduced in the school, there was a great fervor on the part of management that students needed to be able to use computers in school work. At first computers were isolated in a computer lab headed by a new professional and usually the only time students used them was in a keyboarding class or to learn some computer language, neither was needed, but students seldom used them in their classes because the teachers kept them out. Special education program was another. EAHCA entitled the children to be mainstreamed, and what did we end up with, a special education classroom with a new professional. In order to regain the spirit of the program the Congress redesigned the program to include the special education students in the regular classroom. Title one reading program is another example. What happened here, the schools had another pull-out program with another professional. Thus, the classroom teacher has been affected very little.

The way schools are organized also contributes to the sorting function. Grouping students by age was introduced in Quincy Grammar School in this country in1847 by a man named Philbrick. There was a search about this time to find an easier way to administrator schools. This system was adopted from Prussia. It has nothing to do with how students learn. But this system of organization is rational and formalized and fits with the business as usual or functionalists paradigm and the sorting process. Grades of "A, B, C, D, and F" or "1, 2, 3, 4, and 5" has nothing to do with learning. Most professionals cannot describe what a "B" student is. This approach to grading is rational and formalized and does sort students. Other policies which have nothing to do with learning include holding school for 180 days. Holding students accountable for learning a course within a given amount of time came about for reasons related to an agrarian policy and has nothing to do with learning. This practice is also both rational and formalized and also functions to sort

students. Many schools utilize the Carnegie Unit, which requires that each class meet a certain number of minutes each day , each week. The Carnegie Unit has nothing to do with learning. In fact the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools have recommended other alternatives. However, it is rational and formalized and it does sort students.

The question exists, why do new programs that seem to fit better learning seem to disappear after about five years in the school system? The answer appears after one looks at some examples. The first example is the middle school concept. The middle school concept has been around since the 1950's. The middle school concept was an attempt to deal with the transesent student in ways that were appropriate to the needs of the young adolescent student. The concept included core courses, exploratory courses, differentiated staffing, team planning and teaching, block scheduling, teacher counseling, flexible (noncompetitive) grading, and continuous progress or nongraded. This was a new paradigm for transescent education; a type of student centered school.

At first the middle school concept was unfavorably received, because it was student-centered and it didn't seem to be rational and formalized or standardized. It certainly wouldn`t sort the students. However, there have been many schools that have attempted to initiate the middle school concept. In most cases, changing demographics or facility needs served as the impetus for change, rather than the perceived need to improve education for young adolescent students. In such a situation, the terminology and the "trappings" of the middle school concept may be incorporated, and the school may even experiment with different instructional practices. In time, however, the middle school, the student-centered school, takes on the same characteristics of the "business as usual" school. The school is graded, 6-7-8; each student competes for letter grades. Team planning reverts to meetings of departmentalized teacher groups. Seat-time is the primary measurement for determining when a course is completed rather than what each student has achieved. Now the ruse seems to be over. The non-transformation is complete.

The second example is authentic assessment. From authentic assessment has come assessment by portfolio. The basic philosophy of the portfolio is student-centered assessment. Again this concept is from a different paradigm. A portfolio of student work allows individuals to focus on the students accomplishments and progress. Since the old paradigm requires that each practice be standardized, the interest in portfolio assessment has resulted in numerous workshops in which teachers "learn" the procedures necessary to select work for a portfolio and formulate a rubric of some sort to arrive at a grade for each portfolio item, so that the relative worth of student portfolios may be determined. This permits portfolio contents to be judged competitively and "old paradigm" grades can be assigned as usual. The incorporation of portfolio assessment into the old paradigm requires that teachers discuss such questions as "How can you make sure that a child's parents do not contribute to the work? Should all portfolio work be done in class under the supervision of the teacher? Should the portfolio include poor items as well as good items to illustrate how much progress has been made?" Again, the non-transformation is complete. The competitively-graded portfolio becomes business as usual. In both examples the new program or model takes on the characteristic of business as usual and they lose their integrity.

A business consultation corporation recently ran an advertisement in one of the major weekly newsmagazines. It was titled "A Wing and No Prayer". The copy noted the need for organizations to reshape themselves but cautioned that unless improvements impacted all areas of the organization, the efforts to reshape would be useless. The accompanying visual was of a large terrapin turtle. The back portion of the turtle's shell had been raised on stilts, giving the turtle a new, and startling appearance. Such a change would no doubt take a great deal of planning and hard work to implement. However, the turtle is still a turtle. It moves at the same pace and functions in the same way. The change is a purely visual one. If change within school organizations is to be meaningful, it needs to be more than superficial. The prerequisite for real change is a change in the paradigm which underlies the practice.